



Federal Ministry
for the Environment, Climate Action,
Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety



European
Commission

Joint Statement by the Federal Minister for the Environment, Climate Action, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety, and Commissioner Roswall as a result of the Structured Dialogue on implementation of Water legislation

In the midst of unprecedented global warming and extreme weather events, we, the European Commissioner for Environment, Water Resilience and a Competitive Circular Economy and the German Federal Minister for the Environment, Climate Action, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety are committed to jointly boost the implementation of EU water legislation, identify, and overcome the root causes for not achieving the environmental objectives while upscaling successes and rewarding progress. All relevant Federal Ministries and all federal states endorse the process.

While a number of challenges persist, building on the Commission's assessment of the third River Basin Management Plans and further to in-depth discussions during the extremely productive Structured Dialogues at technical level, several areas for accelerated implementation and improvement could be identified.

We have identified the key strategic areas where further significant progress in implementation must be pursued in the short term to make Germany more water resilient. We recognise that water must be managed holistically, taking into account its environmental, economic and transport functions alike.

The Commission for its part will provide the necessary support through several enabling actions set out under the Water Resilience Strategy, including by boosting research and innovation and accelerating digitalisation, enhancing skills, and facilitating public and private investments in green-blue infrastructure.

1. RESTORING AND PROTECTING THE WATER CYCLE

Germany's 2050 vision is to protect, restore and ensure a semi-natural water regime for the long term. This approach is consistent with the objective of the EU Water Resilience Strategy to restore as far as possible and protect the water cycle.

1.1. Renaturalising the German Water System

Leaving "room for the river", where conditions allow, gives watercourses space to expand naturally especially during floods or heavy rainfall.

Instead of modifying rivers artificially which forces the water to flow faster and rise higher, giving the river a wider area to spread out naturally lowers the overall water level and diversify flow velocity. This approach provides a resilient buffer to handle sudden, unprecedented volumes of rain to a certain extent, allowing floodplains to periodically fill with water and so revitalizes valuable riverine habitats, promotes biodiversity, and improves natural water filtration. It also allows communities to integrate the riverbed into their regional planning, creating new parks, recreational areas, and revitalized urban spaces. This will need to be done taking due account of the protection of urban settlements and agricultural land from floods.

To address hydromorphological pressures, artificial modification of watercourses resulting in inland flood risks and barriers to fish migration which remain key obstacles to good ecological status or potential across the country, Germany will:

- Enhance and simplify implementation of nature-based solutions by 2033 and beyond on federal states` level through their funding schemes and on Federal level through the Federal Blue Belt Programme, measures of the Joint Task for the Improvement of Agricultural Structure and Coastal Protection including the Federal Flood Protection Programme, and the Federal Action Plan on Nature-based Solutions for Climate and Biodiversity. The aim is to improve significantly the ecological parameters, while increasing natural water retention.
- Promote water-sensitive urban development and strengthen urban water and climate resilience inter alia through the implementation of the Federal Climate Adaptation Act of 2024 and in the revision of the Federal Building Act, that will enter into force in 2027, but also in already existing approaches and programmes on federal states` level.

The Commission will support these efforts by:

- Establishing a Sponge Facility by 2030 to better coordinate and scale up new and existing initiatives aimed at increasing natural water retention on land.
- Supporting Member States in their choices to maximise the use of EU funds for water resilience in the next Multiannual Financial Framework.
- Contributing to a consistent, as simple as possible and synergetic approach for the implementation of the Water Framework Directive and the Habitats Directive.

1.2. Supporting the Transition to a Sustainable Agriculture

At present, around 1.5 million tonnes of reactive nitrogen are released each year in Germany. Agriculture accounts for the largest share of nitrogen emissions. Whilst acknowledging the measures taken so far, further reductions of nitrogen emissions into the water, air and soil, changes are needed in key areas of the economy and daily life, including agriculture and consumption habits. Detection of pesticide residues in Germany is widespread revealing complex mixtures of active ingredients affecting soils, water and vegetation. Findings occur beyond farmlands also in cities and protected areas. In this context, the German Federal Government will:

- Promote the transition to sustainable agriculture as well as promotion of organic farming. Germany's Organic Strategy 2030 identifies a target of 30% by 2030, and provides clear benefits for water. The structure of the next EU budget is to be taken into account. Continue the revision process of its National Action Plan on the Sustainable Use of Plant Protection Products to reduce the scope and risk of pesticide use.
- Review the fertilisers regulation in the near future with the aim of protecting groundwater, surface water and in the end marine waters, and strengthening the polluter-pays principle, in order to achieve the objectives of the Nitrates Directive as quickly as possible.

The Commission will support these efforts by:

- o Developing an assistance toolbox for Member States by 2027 to support actions to reduce nutrients pollution, including through enhanced modelling, interactive maps and exchanges of best practices.

1.3. Curbing the Risks from Chemical Pollution

As in other Member States, PFAS pollution of water bodies, is a major and very persistent problem that Germany cannot solve on its own so cost-effective measures at source are needed to reduce the emissions into the environment, to protect both the environment and human health.

Germany faces diverse legacy mining pollution, ranging from toxic heavy metal runoff to acidic water and iron ochre leaching into water from former coal pits. Managing this severe historic pollution and healing these environmental scars require intensive, multi-billion-euro remediation projects, groundwater stabilization, and ecological reclamation.

In this context, Germany will:

- Continue research in order to provide information on pollutants including the relevance of PFAS and available techniques for the reduction of PFAS in waste water streams in order to support the working program on the development of BAT;
- Accelerate action to tackle legacy pollution from past mining activities, in particular through sediment management in cooperation with its federal states, building on the successful examples from the Elbe and Rhine River basins.

The Commission will support these efforts by:

- o Organising a dedicated workshop on sediment management until 2030 at the latest, to support exchange of best practices and implementation across Member States and to follow-up on the CIS Guidance on Integrated Sediment Management.
- o Promoting a coherent approach under EU law related to the management of PFAS, including in relation to promoting their substitution now and in the near future, and by developing a coherent methodology to apply limit values for PFAS in existing and future legislation, especially concerning the relevant parameters, and by developing guidance.
- o Ensuring that PFAS regulation will include derogations (e.g. transition periods), which will allow PFAS to continue to be used where there currently are no suitable PFAS-free alternatives or alternative technologies provided that it is justified from a socio-economic point of view.

2. BUILDING A WATER SMART ECONOMY AND A THRIVING EU WATER INDUSTRY

In recent years the annual available renewable water resources in Germany have been significantly lower than the long-term average. Overall water abstraction in Germany has decreased over the past decade, although trends vary across sectors. Water withdrawals for energy production have fallen significantly and are expected to decline further due to the phase-out of coal and nuclear power, together with the expansion of renewable energy sources.

Cooling water withdrawals are projected to decrease by 50–60% by 2030 and by 70–85% by 2050. Water abstraction by the mining and manufacturing sectors has also declined over recent decades. Although water abstraction for agriculture remains lower, it is on the rise. Considering more frequent episodes of drought and water scarcity it will be essential to maintain sustainable levels of water abstraction and improve water efficiency, particularly in the most affected regions.

To increase water efficiency in line with the Water efficiency First Principle and contribute to the EU-wide aspirational target to enhance water efficiency by 10% by 2030 set out in the Water Resilience Strategy and based on the ongoing work on water efficiency targets in development on EU level, as well as to address possible water shortage and ensure equitable use between households, industry and agriculture, Germany will:

- Intensify a better control of the resource across the country. This will be based on the development of robust long-term scenarios of water demand and supply, taking into account climate scenarios.
- Take anticipatory action, in collaboration with federal states, to prepare for water scarcity and low water events. In particular, by 2026, the Federal Environment Ministry will adopt a nationally coordinated guideline, developed together with the federal states, to guide local or regional prioritisation decisions during episodes of water scarcity and for managing competing demands.
- Further explore the potential of increased water efficiency in industrial, public and agricultural water use.

The Commission will support these efforts by:

- o Working with Member States and stakeholders to develop a joint methodology for water efficiency targets taking into account territorial and other differences between countries, regions and sectors, with the aim of establishing benchmarks.
- o Table a proposal for an Integrated Framework for Climate Resilience which will include a legislative proposal.
- o Establishing guidance on the safe reuse of water taking into account health protection and risk prevention, as well as via capacity building in the context of implementing existing legislation.
- o Developing an EU-wide Action Plan on digitalisation in the water sector including an EU-wide initiative on Smart metering, focusing also on enhancing interoperability of data and cybersecurity.

3. SECURING CLEAN AND AFFORDABLE WATER AND SANITATION

While Germany already has a system in place that provides universal high-quality water supply and sanitation, it will continue its efforts to implement relevant EU legislation, inter alia by retrofitting plants where necessary, with a fourth treatment stage. Adequate financing with regard to the extended producer responsibility in the Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive will be essential for federal states. Furthermore, Germany will:

- Continue to play an active role in the support and implementation of the EU zero pollution action plan through the promotion of best practices of the fourth treatment stage for urban wastewater.

The Commission will support these efforts by:

- o Promoting and facilitating coherence in implementation across Member States through different tools, as appropriate.

4. ENHANCING COOPERATION, GOVERNANCE AND SKILLS FOR SUSTAINABLE WATER MANAGEMENT

In Germany, the federal states implement differently the common rules of water legislation. For that reason, as part of its National Water Strategy, Germany is working to improve data availability and interoperability, through a dedicated working group created in the framework of the LAWA (the Working Group on Water Issues of the federal states and the Federal Government). In this context, Germany will:

- Improve the current framework for the collection, storage and use of water-related data for data management and data exchange between sectors, and allow for the development of targeted web-based services for different uses and user groups.
- Create a central hub, publicly, readily and easily accessible data and information for the Federal Government, the federal states and other users, providing in a one stop shop manner data on water quality and quantity but also the legal water management obligations and their implementation across the country. This hub will largely build on the longstanding central information node for water management in Germany (Wasser-DE, <https://www.wasser-de.de/>) as well as the BfG geoportal (<https://geoportal.bafg.de>) and take the dashboard access of the recently created low water level information system (Niedrigwasser-Informationssystem, NIWIS, <https://niwis-online.de/>) into account.
- Assess the possibility of the harmonisation of water abstraction charges, including the possibility of a federal abstraction charge, to incentivise the efficient use of water and earmark revenue generated from these charges to finance water management measures. For this purpose, a research project has been launched and will present its findings by the end of 2026.

As many other EU Member States, Germany is facing a significant shortage of skilled labour, with a gap of hundreds of thousands of skilled workers, and this challenge extends to the water sector. Over 130,000 vacancies for skilled professionals in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) remained vacant in 2026.

Acknowledging the importance of a skilled workforce for the water sector, the government and private sector lead robust initiatives to develop these careers. In this context, Germany commits to:

- Continue its efforts in upskilling and supporting specially municipalities and local level actors to implement measures to attract talent to the water sector.

The Commission for its part will support these efforts by:

- Launching a European Water Academy by 2026.
- Enhancing vocational training by increasing its support to the Platform of Vocational Excellence Water (PoVE Water).

Conclusion

This Structured Dialogue marks an important step in the collaboration between Germany and the European Commission. It reaffirms a shared commitment to achieving the ambitious objectives of EU water legislation for the benefit of citizens and nature, as set out in the Commissions' Water Resilience Strategy. Both parties recognise that durable progress requires cross-sectoral integration, effective governance and structural measures and more simplification in the implementation of the European water policy and the Water Resilience Strategy.

This declaration represents a renewed partnership and a joint determination to secure a water-resilient, clean and prosperous future for Germany.

In order to foster an open dialogue between the Commission and the federal states, Commissioner Roswall will participate in one of the upcoming meetings of the Conference of Environment Ministers (UMK) to discuss water management in Germany.

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